BACKBITING

And Its Adverse Effects

الغيبة

وأثرها السيء في المجتمع الإسلامي

Husayn al-Awayishah

الدار العالمية للكتاب الإسلامي

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC PUBLISHING HOUSE

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Translated by

Huda Khattab

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About the word 'Lord'

The word *lord* in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is 'master' or 'ruler', and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: 'the lord of the mansion' or 'Lord So-and-so' (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God — Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah — not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

The Editor

Arabic honorific symbols used in this book

(ﷻ) : *Subḥânahu wa Ta'âla* — "The Exalted"

(ﷺ) : *Ṣalla-Allâhu 'Alayhi wa Sallam* — "Blessings and peace be upon him"

(عليه السلام) : *'Alayhis-Salâm* — "May peace be upon him"

(رضي الله عنه) : *Raḍia-Allâhu 'Anhu* — "May Allah be pleased with him"

(رضي الله عنها) : *Raḍia-Allâhu 'Anhâ* — "May Allah be pleased with her"

Transliteration Chart

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated as:
أ	short 'a', as in *cat*	a
آ – ى	longer 'a', as in *cab* (not as in *cake*)	â
ب	/b/ as in *bell*, *rubber* and *tab*	b
ت	/t/ as in *tap, mustard* and *sit*	t
ة	takes the sound of the preceding diactrical mark sometimes ending in h (when in pausal form): ah, ih, or ooh; or atu(n), ati(n) or ata(n) when in uninterrupted speech	h or t (when followed by another Arabic word)
ث	/th/ as in *thing*, *maths* and *wealth*	th
ج	/j/ as in *jam*, *ajar* and *age*	j
ح	a 'harsher' sound than the English initial /h/, and may occur medially and in word-final position as well	ḥ
خ	as in *Bach* (in German); may occur initially and medially as well	kh
د	/d/ as in *do*, *muddy* and *red*	d
ذ	as in *this*, *father*, and *with*	dh
ر	/r/ as in *raw*, *art* and *war*; may also be a rolled r, as with Spanish words	r

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated as:
ز	/z/ as in *zoo*, *easy* and *gaze*	z
س	/s/ as in *so*, *messy* and *grass*	s
ش	as in *ship*, *ashes* and *rush*	sh
ص	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /sw/ or /s/ farther back in the mouth	ṣ
ض	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing /d/ farther back in the mouth	ḍ
ط	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing /t/ farther back in the mouth	ṭ
ظ	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing 'the' farther back in the mouth	dh
ع	no close equivalent in English: a guttural sound in the back of the throat	ʿ
غ	no close equivalent in English, but may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like the French /r/ in 'rouge'	gh
ف	/f/ as in *fill*, *effort* and *muff*	f

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated as:
ق	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing /k/ farther back in the mouth	q
ك	/k/ as in *king*, *buckle* and *tack*	k
ل	/l/ as in *lap*, *halo*; in the word *Allah*, it becomes velarized as in *ball*	l
م	/m/ as in *men*, *simple* and *ram*	m
ن	/n/ as in *net*, *ant* and *can*	n
هـ - ه - ـه	/h/ as in hat; unlike /h/ in English, in Arabic /h/ is pronounced in medial and word-final positions as well	h
و	as in *wet* and *away*	w
و (as a vowel)	long u, as in *boot* and *too*	oo
ي	as in *yet* and *yard*	y
ي (as a vowel)	long e, as in *eat*, *beef* and *see*	ee
ء	glottal stop: may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like 't' in the Cockney English pronunciation of *butter*: *bu'er*, or the stop sound in *uh - oh!*	' (Omitted in initial position)

Diphthongs:

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated as:
أَوْ ، وَ	Long o, as in *owe*, *boat* and *go*	au, aw, ow
أَيْ ، يَ	Long 'a', as in *able*, *rain* and *say*	ay, ai, ei

Diacritical marks (*tashkeel*):

Name of mark	Pronunciation	Transliterated as:
َ fatḥah	very short 'a' or schwa (unstressed vowel)	a
ِ kasrah	shorter version of ee or schwa (unstressed vowel)	i
ُ Dammah	shorter version of oo	u
ّ shaddah	a doubled consonant is stressed in the word, and the length of the sound is also doubled	Double letter
ْ sukoon	no vowel sound between consonants or at the end of a word	Absence of vowel

Translator's Foreword

Gheebah is not an easy term to translate — there is no single equivalent word in English, although it may be loosely covered by the term 'backbiting'. For this reason, the title has been changed from Gossip to Backbiting in this new and revised edition, because 'backbiting' is a more accurate translation of the Arabic word gheebah. Gheebah also includes gossiping, slandering, scandal-mongering, spreading rumours and so forth.

Whichever word we choose, we cannot escape from the fact that backbiting affects us all. We have all been victims and, we must be honest, we have all been guilty of this sin. But it is not a matter to be taken lightly; gossip can wreck lives and shatter communities. If we seek to unite as Muslims, we must combat gheebah.

Islam is a practical faith that recognizes the human condition and offers achievable remedies to the problems that beset us. Every human society faces the problem of backbiting, and Islam shows us how to tackle it in a sensible and humane manner. (Interestingly enough, it is not assumed to be solely a female preserve, as popular notions would have us believe!) Ḥusayn al-'Awayishah has researched the topic in depth, and has presented a concise guide to the evils of gheebah and what can be done about it. This book may make for uncomfortable reading, but this topic is one that every one of us has to face up to.

Huda Khattab

Preface to the Third Edition

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with him from the evils of our own souls and deeds. Whomever Allah guides, no one can lead astray, and whomever Allah leaves astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِۦ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ١٠٢)

﴾O you who believe! Fear Allah as he should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.﴿ *(Qur'an 3: 102)*

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُوا۟ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَآءً ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى تَسَآءَلُونَ بِهِۦ وَٱلْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ﴿١﴾﴾

(سورة النساء: ١)

﴾O people! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered [like seeds] countless men and women; — reverence Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual [rights], and [reverence] the wombs [that bore you]: for Allah ever watches over you.﴿

(Qur'an 4: 1)

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَقُولُوا۟ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٧٠﴾ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَٰلَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٧١﴾﴾

(سورة الأحزاب: ٧٠-٧١)

﴾O you who believe! Fear Allah, and [always] say a word directed to the Right: that He may make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins: he that obeys Allah and His Messenger, has already attained the highest achievement.﴿ *(Qur'an 33: 70-71)*

The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allah (ﷻ) (*Subḥânahu wa Ta'âla* — Glorified and Exalted is He), and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (ﷺ). The worst of affairs are those that are fabricated. Everything that is fabricated is an innovation; every innovation is a deviation, and every deviation leads to hellfire.

This is a new and revised edition of *Backbiting* (formerly entitled *Gossip*). The text has been amended and corrected; unnecessary material has been omitted, difficult terminology has been explained in a clear manner, and the sources and chains of narration of the hadiths quoted have been examined in more detail with reference to the books, published and unpublished, of Shaykh Al-Albâni, may Allah preserve him.

I ask Allah (ﷻ) to benefit others through me, to accept this work from me, and to make me one of the sincere workers. Truly He is the One Who hears all prayers.

Ḥusayn al-Awayishah

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Compassionate, All-Merciful

Introduction

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with him from the evils of our own souls and deeds. Whomever Allah, the Exalted, Almighty, guides, no one can lead astray, and whomever Allah leaves astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah Alone, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

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The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (ﷺ). The worst of affairs are those that are fabricated. Everything that is fabricated is an innovation; every innovation is a deviation, and every deviation leads to hellfire.

When I thought about people's tongues, it was as if they were burning flames or poisonous snakes! How much sadness, grief and evil they cause!

So I determined to write a book on this matter, seeking to earn the pleasure of Allah (ﷻ), and to protect and help the Muslims, firstly by explaining the dangers and evils of the tongue, and the grief, sorrow and regret that it can cause in this world and the next; and then by showing how these problems may be avoided, *inshâ' Allâh* (Allah willing).

I wrote many chapters; indeed, years passed, and I still had not completed the project. I was weighed down with other work commitments, until Allah (ﷻ) made it easier for me to complete the research. I wrote about all the evil results that can come from people's tongues under the title *Ḥaṣâ'id al-Alsun* (*The Harvest of the Tongues*). However, I felt that it would be more useful to deal with

the topic of backbiting by focusing on it and writing a book solely on this topic, which is what I have done — *wa mâ tawfiqi illâ billâh* (and with Allah alone is my success).

I wish to offer my deepest thanks to everyone who has helped in the production of this book, above all to my Shaykh (scholarly teacher) Muhammad Naṣir ad-Deen al-Albâni (may Allah preserve him), who let me use whatever I needed on this subject from his valuable work entitled *Ṣaḥeeḥ at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, and various other works of research of his. May Allah reward him with good on my behalf and on behalf of all the Muslims.

I ask Allah (ﷻ) to benefit me through this work, and that it may be a witness for me and not against me (on the Day of Judgement). Truly He is able to do all things.

Texts that indicate the prohibition of gheebah

﴿... وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾﴾ (سورة الحُجرَات: ١٢)

﴾... Nor speak ill of each other behind their backs.[1] Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it... But fear Allah: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.﴿

(Qur'an 49: 12)

Al-Muṭṭalib ibn 'Abdullâh narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «*Gheebah* (gossip, backbiting) means that a man mentions about a person something which is true, behind his back.»[2]

Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) related that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «Do you know what gheebah is? They said: Allah and His Messenger know best. He said: (It is) your mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes.»[3]

Abu Barzah al-Aslami and Al-Barâ' ibn 'Âzib narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «O you people who pay lip-service to faith when it has not entered your hearts! Do not gossip about the Muslims and do not expose their faults. Whoever exposes the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will expose his faults, and if Allah exposes his faults it will be open for everyone to see, even if he hid in the innermost part of his house.»[4]

What is gheebah? It is clear from the above that gheebah means saying something about a person that is true, but which s/he dislikes, behind his/her back.

BACKBITING AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECTS

Consensus of the scholars on the prohibition of backbiting and on the fact that it is a major sin

Ibn Katheer, may Allah have mercy on him, said in his *tafseer*[5] of Soorat al-Ḥujurât:

> Backbiting is forbidden by consensus (*ijmâ'*), and in general there is no exception to that, save in circumstances where it is necessary to speak about people, such as establishing the status and authenticity of hadith narrators and giving advice.

Al-Qurṭubi said: "The scholars agree that it is a major sin, and that committing this sin necessitates repentance to Allah (ﷻ)."[6] This is apparent from the words of Allah:

﴿... أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ... ﴿١٢﴾﴾

(سورة الحُجرَات: ١٢)

﴾... Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it...﴿ *(Qur'an 49: 12)*

Indications that gheebah is a major sin are also to be found in the following hadiths: «What is worse than usury is a man insulting the honour of his brother» and the words of the Prophet (ﷺ) to

'Â'ishah (ﷺ) after she had made a comment about one of her co-wives: «You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been (polluted) (meaning, the enormity of it is such that, even if it were mixed with the vast waters of the sea, its power to harm would not be diluted or weakened at all).»

Common but invalid excuses for backbiting

Satan comes to people from different angles to tempt them to backbite or gossip. He says to some of them: "What you are saying behind the person's back is true, so there is nothing wrong with it."

However, this is prohibited according to the words of the Prophet (ﷺ), such as in the two hadiths mentioned above. Gheeebah manes that a person mentions something about another person that is true, behind his/her back. The hadith of Abu Hurayrah (ﷺ) relating that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, «Do you know what backbiting is? They said: Allah and His Messenger know best. He said: (It is) your mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes. Someone asked: What if what I say about my brother is true? He said: If what you say is true, then this is backbiting; and if it is not true, then it is slander.»

The hadiths quoted in *Al-Aḥâdeeth al-Mukhtârah*, from the report of Aḍ-Ḍiyâ' al-Maqdisi[7] from Anas ibn Mâlik, who said: «The Arabs used to serve one another on their journeys. Abu Bakr and 'Umar had a man with them who used to serve them. (One day) they woke up and (found that) he had not prepared any food for them. One of them said to the other: This one is sleeping as if he was at home! (they were criticizing him for sleeping too long). So they woke him up and said to him: Go to the Messenger of Allah and tell him: Abu Bakr and 'Umar send you *salâm* (greetings of peace) and wish to

request some food from you. He (ﷺ) said: They have eaten. They were astonished to hear this, so they came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: O Messenger of Allah! We sent word to you to request food, and you said that we had eaten. What have we eaten? He said: The flesh of your brother. By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I can see his flesh between your teeth. They said: Pray for forgiveness for us. He said: Let him pray for forgiveness for you!»

When they said, "This one is sleeping as if were at home!", it was true, but the Prophet (ﷺ) told them that they had eaten of his flesh.

People should beware of eating their brother's flesh by saying such things as: How often so-and-so takes a bath! How much s/he eats! How mean s/he is! How much s/he sleeps! Some people will say, "We are saying this behind his/her back for his/her own benefit, even if s/he does not know what is good for him/her!" They may even say, "We are doing this in the interests of the community at large."

These claims may be dismissed on several counts:

1. Any deed that is done must be done according to sharia. Good intentions alone, with no regard to anything else, will not be sufficient to save a person from the wrath of Allah. Indeed, the pagans at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) claimed to have the best of intentions, but Allah (ﷻ) made their status very clear in the Qur'an when He said:

﴿...أَوْلِيَآءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰٓ ...﴾ (سورة الزُّمَـر: ٣)

﴿... But those who take for protectors other than Allah [say], "We only serve them in order that they may bring us nearer to Allah"...﴾

(Qur'an 39: 3)

They may have had this noble intention — namely, to be brought closer to Allah — but that did not prevent the Prophet (ﷺ) and his noble Companions from fighting them.

Doing good deeds in the interests of an individual or the community cannot be achieved by gossiping about people or spreading rumours about their private affairs!

2. If the claims are true and said with the best of intentions, then the method of acting upon those intentions must also be sound. This is best achieved by speaking directly to the person, and encouraging him/her, with gentle wisdom, to adhere to the teachings of Islam and to avoid following his/her own whims. This advice and encouragement may need to be repeated; but if this brings no result, then look for someone else to give this advice to the person, because your approach may not have worked. Ask the person you approach to keep secret whatever you tell him/her about the person concerned. He should choose the most appropriate way of approaching the person, directly or indirectly. If you find that the person will not give up his/her shameful deed or sin, even after repeatedly advising him/her, then all you can do is leave alone the one who is committing the sin in secret, and do not disclose it to anyone. If you do disclose it, you will have caused many problems in the Muslim community, including the following:

2.a. You will have transgressed the texts which command us to cover the faults of a fellow-Muslim.

2.b. You will have spread doubts, thus causing Muslims to be suspicious of even the best among them, and made it harder for them to trust one another.

2.c. You will have caused Muslims to indulge in backbiting about one another and you will have spread hatred among them, thus distracting them from the urgent matters that face them, the community and the Ummah as a whole.

2.d. You will have created a situation in which the one who had committed the sin in secret now is unable to hide what Allah had

previously kept hidden for him — as if he or she is committing the sin openly.

3. Every intelligent person will accept that there can be no benefit to the Muslim community in talking about a person who is trying to conceal his faults and sins. What possible benefit can there be in such talk? What good can this do the Muslim Ummah — liberate Jerusalem? Or destroy *shirk*[8] and all forms of oppression?

4. Not only does backbiting fail to achieve the purposes claimed — whether at an individual or community level — but the victim may begin to hate those who spoke about him in his absence, until the situation deteriorates as the poet described:

There are no blood-ties and no friendship (between us),
The gulf is too wide to be bridged.

Some of the motives for backbiting[9] and the Islamic response to them

1 - Getting things off one's chest (especially in the case of hatred)

One person may do something to upset another, and whenever the aggrieved party feels angry about backbiting, s/he will get it off his/her chest by telling his/her friends about it. To avoid doing this, we should remember the words of Allah (سبحانه وتعالى):

﴿ ۞ وَسَارِعُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ
أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ فِي ٱلسَّرَّآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَٱلْكَٰظِمِينَ ٱلْغَيْظَ
وَٱلْعَافِينَ عَنِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾ ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٣٣-١٣٤)

﴾Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that [of the whole] of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous, — those who spend [freely], whether in prosperity or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon [all] men; — for Allah loves those who do good.﴿ *(Qur'an 3: 133-134)*

There is also the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): «Whoever controls his anger, even though he is in a position to act upon it, Allah will call him in front of all the people on the Day of Judgement and invite him to choose whoever he wishes of *al-ḥoor al-'een.*»[10]

The one who gossips in order to 'get something off his/her chest' is not considered to be one who has controlled his/her anger.

2 - Joining in with a group of friends

When a group is indulging in the discussion of people's honour, a person may think that if s/he speaks out and tries to stop them, they will dislike him/her and exclude him/her. So s/he joins in with them, believing that this is how to be good company. However, we should remember the words of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): «Whoever seeks to earn the approval of the people by angering Allah, Allah will abandon him to the people.»[11]

3 - Seeking to raise one's own status by putting others down

In this case, a person may say, "So-and-so is ignorant, he is not clever..." and so on. By doing this, s/he seeks to prove that s/he is better, and that s/he knows better. We should remind ourselves that what is with Allah is better and is eternal, and that this world is not even worth a gnat's wing in the sight of Allah. This person may be better than you in the sight of Allah (ﷻ), as in the hadith: «Maybe

this scruffy man, who has doors shut in his face, if he swore an oath to Allah and asked him for something, Allah would do it for him!»[12]

4 - Fooling around and joking

A person may mention another in such a way as to make people laugh — some people even earn their living in this way.[13] But we have to remember the words of the Prophet (ﷺ): «Woe to him who tells lies in order to make the people laugh — woe to him, woe to him!»[14]

5 - Jealousy

It may happen that a person is praised in a gathering where s/he is liked by the people, and a jealous person may hear this. The jealous one then insults the other, so that the latter may lose the status that s/he previously enjoyed. I have discussed the answer to this problem in my book on the broader topic mentioned in the Introduction.[15]

The jealous person should remember that, because of his/her jealousy and insults, the person who is the object of his/her envy will be above him/her, not only in this world but on the Day of Resurrection.

6 - If a person has been accused of doing something

If a person has been accused of doing something, s/he might mention the name of the one who actually did do it, in order to clear his/her own name, thinking that this is the best way; or else s/he will mention someone else who took part in the deed, hoping thus to excuse himself/herself by saying, "so-and-so did it, and so-and-so did

it too." The person has the right to protect his/her innocence, but s/he does not have the right to mention the one who did the deed, or any others who took part in it.

7 - Anger for the sake of Allah

A person may become angry because of a sin committed by another person, so s/he talks about it,[16] demonstrating his/her anger and mentioning that person's name, when s/he should have concealed that person's name and not mentioned him/her in this way.

8 - Saying, "poor so-and-so"

A person may feel sorry for his/her brother because s/he is going through some hardship, so s/he mentions him/her by name saying, "Poor so-and-so, s/he's really going through a bad time!" S/he may be sincere in what s/he says, but it is wrong for him/her to mention the name of the person s/he is speaking about. In this case, we should remember the words of Allah:

﴿فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُۥ ۝٧ وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُۥ ۝٨﴾ (سورة الزّلزلة: ٧-٨)

﴾Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it.﴿ *(Qur'an 99: 7-8)*

How much evil results from the backbiting of Muslims! A good intention does not justify an evil deed, as we have explained above. A person will be rewarded for his/her intention but s/he is deemed a sinner because of his/her deed.

9- Use of free time

A person who has too much free time and feels bored, may find nothing better with which to occupy his/her time than talking about people and their faults, and mentioning things they dislike. To combat this, we should fill our spare time with worthwhile activities, worship, and the pursuit of knowledge; we should remind ourselves of the words of the Prophet (ﷺ): «The son of Âdam will not be dismissed by his Lord on the Day of Resurrection until he has been asked about five things: his life, and how he spent it; his youth, and how he made use of it; his wealth and how he earned it; and on what he spent it; and what he did with the knowledge he acquired.»[17]

10 - Seeking favour

A person may seek to get closer to his/her bosses by criticizing his/her colleagues in order to gain promotion or to make them think well of him/her. The Muslim should remember the Qur'anic verses and hadiths that speak of sustenance (it comes only from Allah), and that no harm or benefit can befall him/her except by the permission of Allah. Belief in *al-qadar* (predestination) is the basis for combating this problem. Hence I would remind such people of the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): «Whoever seeks to earn the approval of the people by angering Allah, Allah will abandon him to the people.»

11- Conceit and a lack of awareness of one's faults

The answer to this problem is to take the opposite approach: a person should think about his/her own faults, try to put them right, and feel ashamed to criticize anyone else when s/he has faults of his or her own. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) condemned conceit and

said: «If you were not to sin, I would fear something even worse for you: conceit, conceit!»[18]

Hadiths aimed at deterring people from backbiting

Abu Bakrah (ﷺ) related that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, in his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage: «Your blood, your wealth and your honour are sacred, as this day of yours, in this month of yours, in this land of yours, are sacred. Have I not told you?»[19]

Let us think deeply about this, and regard the orders of Allah (ﷻ) and His Last Prophet (ﷺ) with the awe that they deserve. In the sight of Allah, violating the rights of your brother by gossiping is equivalent to violating the sanctity of the Day of Sacrifice, in the month of Dhul Hijjah in Mina. Do you not realize the enormity of violating a Muslim's honour, O you who participate in backbiting and gossip, and consume the flesh of Muslims?

Al-Barrâ' ibn 'Âzib (ﷺ) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «There are seventy-two degrees of usury, the least of which is equivalent to committing adultery with one's own mother. The worst of them is a man insulting his brother's honour.»[20]

Allâhu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest) Where is our reason? Allâhu Akbar! Where is the faith that should fill our hearts? Where is the faith that should control the whims and desires of the self? Where is the faith that will stop us from insulting the honour of our fellow-Muslims?

How serious a sin usury is! The matter is regarded as being of such enormity that Allah declared war on whoever deals in it. The lowest degree of usury is equivalent to a man's committing adultery

with his own mother, but the *worst* type of usury is a man's insulting his brother's honour. Do you not understand?

So go ahead and insult your brother's honour to your heart's content: indulge in backbiting, spread rumours, insult and criticize; but where will you run to on the Day of Judgement?

'Â'ishah (رضي الله عنها) related, «I said to the Prophet (ﷺ): It's bad enough that Ṣafiyah is... (Some of narrators said: she meant that she was short). He said: You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been (polluted).[21] (meaning, the enormity of it is such that even if it were mixed with the vast waters of the sea, its power to harm would not be diluted or weakened at all).»

A word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, the ocean would have been polluted! One word alone could do this, and have such a far-reaching impact! So what do you think of the gossips of today, whose tongues never cease to wag! What vast oceans could be tainted and corrupted by their words! How many quiet lives are disrupted by them!

'Amr ibn Shu'ayb reported from his father who related from his grandfather: (the people) mentioned a man to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying: «He doesn't feed until he is fed and he doesn't visit anybody until they have visited him first. The Prophet said: You have gossiped about him. They said: O Messenger of Allah! We have mentioned about him something which is true. He said: It is bad enough that you have mentioned something about your brother which is true (for it is behind his back).»[22]

We should all ask ourselves: who among us is infallible? Who has made his/her *qareen*[23] submit in Islam? Who among us is free from errors, faults and sins? Who among us would be content to have everything about him/her, good and bad, spoken of by others? Any

one of us becomes furious if s/he hears someone hinting something about him/her; so what would you do if it was said clearly and in detail, let alone behind your back?

Anas (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «When I was taken up into heaven, I passed by people who had copper claws tearing at their faces and chests. I asked: Who are these, O Jibreel? He said: They are those who ate the flesh of the people, and insulted their honour.»[24]

Have these gossips lost their minds? How can they continue to insult the honour of Muslims and eat their flesh after hearing this hadith? Let them have the glad tidings of copper claws tearing at their faces and chests! These claws are far worse than the claws of savage wild beasts, so as to intensify the punishment for their evil deeds. So it is up to each of us to decide how much we wish to indulge in gossip after reading this!

'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ood (رضي الله عنه) related: «We were with the Prophet (ﷺ), when a man got up and left, whereupon another man immediately started to involve himself in backbiting about him. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: Clean the bits of meat from between your teeth! He said: What should I clean from between my teeth? I haven't eaten any meat! He said: You have eaten the flesh of your brother!»[25]

This is the state of our community nowadays: any one of us may commit the sin of gossip or backbiting, but then will say, "I didn't gossip, I didn't participate in backbiting; I haven't done anything!" Why? Because we have allowed our tongues to become accustomed to speaking this way, without knowing what gheebah is.

Let us learn about our religion. Let us learn about what is permissible and what is forbidden, as much as we can, and distinguish between speech that is permissible and the speech that is forbidden.[26]

The prohibition of listening to backbiting

Allah (ﷻ) mentions:

﴿... إِنَّ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْبَصَرَ وَٱلْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْـُٔولًا ﴿٣٦﴾﴾

(سورة الإسراء: ٣٦)

﴿... Every act of hearing, or seeing, or of [feeling in] the heart will be enquired into [on the Day of Reckoning].﴾ *(Qur'an 17: 36)*

﴿... وَإِمَّا يُنسِيَنَّكَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ ٱلذِّكْرَىٰ مَعَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾﴾

(سورة الأنعام: ٦٨)

﴿... If Satan ever makes you forget, then after recollection, do not sit in the company of those who do wrong.﴾ *(Qur'an 6: 68)*

﴿وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا۟ ٱللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا۟ عَنْهُ ... ﴿٥٥﴾﴾ (سورة القصص: ٥٥)

﴿And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom...﴾ *(Qur'an 28: 55)*

Ka'b ibn Mâlik narrated in the long hadith concerning his repentance that: «The Prophet (ﷺ) said, when he was sitting among the people at Tabook: What happened to Ka'b ibn Mâlik? A man from Banu Salamah said: O Messenger of Allah, the beauty of his cloak and the appreciation of his appearance (have detained him)! Mu'âdh ibn Jabal (رضي الله عنه) said: Woe be upon that which you have said. By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, we know nothing about him but good. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) kept quiet.»[27]

What do we learn from these texts?

1. That listening and paying attention to gossip is something for which the individual will have to answer to Allah (ﷻ).

2. That it is prohibited to sit with people who are gossiping and participating in backbiting.

3. That refusing to listen to gheebah and bad speech is one of the qualities of the believer.

The hadith that related the story of the Companion Ka'b (ﷺ) goes beyond the rejection of gheebah: the Muslim's honour should be defended by criticizing what the gossip says, and by saying something good about the person that is true. Thus Mu'âdh (ﷺ) said to the gossip, "Woe be upon that which you have said. By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, we know nothing about him but good."

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Whoever defends the honour of his brother, Allah will protect his face from the fire on the Day of Resurrection.»[28]

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Whoever defends his brother in his absence, Allah will defend him in this world and the next.»[29]

These are matters which are well understood; there is no excuse for any nonsense talk or backbiting. However, anyone looking at people nowadays will see them behaving in the opposite manner. You will see them:

1. Paying attention to the gossip who criticizes a fellow Muslim;

2. Listening to it with enjoyment,[30] hoping to hear more bad news about the person;

3. Adding some news or descriptions of their own, mentioning something that s/he dislikes about their brother/sister, and thus co-operating with Satan;

4. Agreeing with the gossip and supporting him/her in his/her criticism of the Muslim who is absent.

﴿أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَنَّهُم مَّبْعُوثُونَ ۝٤ لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ۝٥ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ ٱلنَّاسُ لِرَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ۝٦﴾ (سورة المطفّفين: ٤-٦)

﴾Do they not think that they will be called to account? — on a Mighty Day, a Day when [all] humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?﴿ *(Qur'an 83: 4-6)*

The poet described them correctly when he said:

You would have been heard if you had called
people with life in them,
But there is no life in those whom you call.
If you had blown into a fire it would have blazed up,
But what you are blowing into is dead ashes.

A better description is given in the Qur'an, where Allah (ﷻ) indicates:

﴿وَسَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ۝١٠﴾ (سورة يس: ١٠)

﴾The same is it to them whether you admonish them or you do not admonish them: they will not believe.﴿ *(Qur'an 36: 10)*

One of the verses of poetry on the prohibition of listening to gossip says:

Protect your ears from listening to evil talk,
as you would protect your tongue from speaking it.
For when you listen to evil talk,
You are an accomplice of the one who is speaking
— so beware!

The one who listens to gossip and the one who gossips are the same

Remember the hadith of Anas (رضي الله عنه) that was quoted above,[31] in which it was said: «One of them said to his companion: This one is sleeping as if he were at home! Only one of them said this, but the other one listened and agreed with him, so the Prophet (ﷺ) said to both the speaker and the listener: You have already eaten! Then he said: By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I can see his flesh between your teeth.»

How to stop backbiting

If any of us hears gossip or any other form of backbiting about one of our brothers or sisters, we are enjoined to oppose it, and correct the speaker — gently, politely, and with wisdom. This is in accordance with the various ways of changing a bad deed that were described by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).[32] We should try to point them out to the best of our ability. The least of these is opposing the wrong deed in our hearts, which in this case should make us leave the gathering where the backbiting is taking place.

Let us think about the words of Allah (سبحانه وتعالى):

﴿وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِىٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُوا۟ فِى حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِۦ ۚ وَإِمَّا يُنسِيَنَّكَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ ٱلذِّكْرَىٰ مَعَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾﴾

(سورة الأنعام: ٦٨)

﴿When you see men engaged in vain discourse about Our signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme. If Satan ever makes you forget, then after recollection, do not sit in the company of those who do wrong.﴾ *(Qur'an 6: 68)*

Let those who relish gossip beware! The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) ordered those who hear gossip to reject it, but they are accepting it with pleasure! Woe to you! Are you not thinking about where you will end up? It is as if you think you were created only for fooling about and committing sins! For your Lord's sake, tell me: are you Muslims?

The virtue of speaking up for a Muslim in his absence, and opposing backbiting

Abu ad-Dardâ' (ﷺ) related that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «Whoever defends the honour of his brother, this will be a protection for him from the fire.»[33]

The female Companion, Asmâ' bint Yazeed (ﷺ), reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Whoever defends his brother's honour in his absence, will be entitled to Allah's protection from the fire.»[34] In another hadith mentioned earliar, the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Whoever defends his brother's honour, Allah will protect his face from the fire on the Day of Resurrection.»[35]

Mu'âdh ibn Anas al-Juḥani narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Whoever protects a Muslim from a hypocrite, (probably he said): Allah will send an angel to protect his flesh from the fire of hell; and whoever accuses a Muslim of something, seeking to disgrace him, Allah will detain him on the bridge of hell until he has been fully punished for what he said.»[36]

The stench of those who indulge in backbiting against the believers

The Companion Jâbir (ﷺ) reported: «We were with the Prophet (ﷺ), when there came a foul smell. The Messenger of Allah

(ﷺ) said: Do you know what this smell is? This is the stench of those who gossip about the believers.»[37]

Punishment in the grave for the one who indulges in backbiting

Abu Bakrah (رضي الله عنه), the Companion, narrated: «Whilst the Prophet (ﷺ) was walking between me and another man, we passed by two graves. He said: The occupants of these graves are being punished, bring me a palm frond. Abu Bakrah said: So my companion and I rushed to bring him the palm frond. He split it in two, and placed one half on each grave, then said: May their punishment be lessened until this dries up, for they are being punished for no major sin: one used to spread gossip and the other did not purify himself with water after urinating.»[38]

The person who participates in backbiting is a coward with a weak personality

The person who engages in backbiting is a coward with a weak personality because s/he cannot confront the person concerned. If s/he were brave, s/he would tell him/her to his/her face, and gently point out that person's faults and wrong deeds, such as breaking a promise, failing to honour guests properly, or going along with his or her spouse in ways that displease Allah (ﷻ).

Why can we not be brave enough to confront a person with his/her mistakes so that we earn the reward for enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and fulfilling the words of Allah (ﷻ)?

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّن دَعَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِى مِنَ

ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾ (سورة فُصِّلَت: ٣٣)

﴿Who is better in speech than one who calls [people] to Allah, works righteousness, and says: I am of those who bow in Islam?﴾

(Qur'an 41: 33)

Furthermore, if you confront the person directly, s/he may become aware of his/her sins and shortcomings. However, if you say the same words behind his/her back, you yourself will become blameworthy in the sight of Allah (ﷻ) for eating the flesh of your brother. If your words reach the person concerned, you will not have a leg to stand on, and you may even resort to lying ("I didn't say that!").

So choose which way you want to go: everyone will go in the direction that will fulfil the purpose s/he was created for.

The one who indulges in backbiting is lacking in faith

O backbiter, pay heed! Do you not know that you are lacking in faith? Have you not heard the words of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): «None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself?»[39]

Do you truly wish for your brother what you wish for yourself when you backbite about him or her? Would you like it if someone else were to say something you dislike behind your back? How can you do something that you would hate to have done to you?

Do you not realize that there is a connection between faith and giving up gheebah? Think about the words of the hadith: «None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.» The one who wishes for his brother/sister what s/he wishes for himself/herself has a heart that has been guided; the path of faith

has been made easy for him/her. The one who does not do that should think deeply about the Prophet's words: «He does not truly believe.»

Think about what price you are paying for your enjoyment of backbiting; remember that faith is the dearest thing a person can possess.

Backbiting disrupts the enjoining of what is good and the forbidding of what is evil

If we were truly sincere in our Islam and in our deeds, when we saw someone doing something wrong, we would confront him/her with his/her mistake or sin. We would mention it openly, and enjoin him/her to do what is right and to give up evil.

Every time we see someone doing something wrong and Satan comes to tempt us to gossip about it, we should remind ourselves that the deed that he makes so attractive is in fact a sin, and that the human soul is prone to do evil deeds[40] that earn the wrath of Allah (ﷻ).

One may ask: But what outlet is there for the heart that is overwhelmed with frustration because of a person's continual shortcomings and sins? The answer is that we know that the religion of Allah is one of ease and mercy; this frustration may therefore be channelled into making a person better and more obedient to Allah.

So go to the one who is committing the sin or who has the shortcoming, and get it all off your chest — as long as you do this purely for the sake of Allah. Speak gently and with wisdom, and explain to him/her that you are doing this because you wish for him/her what you would wish for yourself; do not leave unsaid anything that is in your heart.

Go back to him/her every time you see the sin or shortcoming repeated. Keep on enjoining what is right and forbidding evil. By doing this, you will be one of the best of peoples evolved for humankind. Have you not read the words of Allah (ﷻ)?

﴿كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ...﴿١١٠﴾﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١١٠)

﴿You are the best of peoples, evolved for humankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah...﴾

(Qur'an 3: 110)

Yet we can see that most people nowadays, it is sad to say, prefer sin to obedience; they want to vent the anger that they feel in their hearts towards their brothers and sisters, but they can find no other way to do so except through backbiting. Shame on them for what they do!

Types of backbiting that are permitted

Having discussed backbiting in general, we will now explain the types of backbiting that are permitted according to sharia.

However, beware of the fact that Satan can mislead a person to abuse these exceptions and take them as an excuse to do things that are forbidden, so that s/he may find himself/herself constantly involved in backbiting if s/he is not careful.

The types of backbiting that are permitted are clearly defined and strictly limited, and such things must only be said when the intention is correct. There must be no motive of venting one's anger or of defaming the person. Allah (ﷻ) ﴿knows of [the tricks] that deceive with the eyes, and all that the hearts [of people] conceal﴾.[41] The types of backbiting that are permitted are as follows:[42]

1. Complaint — such as putting one's case (involving another person) to a ruler or judge: The evidence for this is the report of 'Â'ishah (ﷺ) in which she said: «Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyân, told the Prophet (ﷺ): Abu Sufyân is a miserly man and does not give me enough for myself and my child, but I take from him without his knowing. He said: Take what is sufficient for yourself and your child, and no more.»[43]

Further evidence for this category is to be found in the hadith of Abu Hurayrah (ﷺ), who narrated: «A man said: O Messenger of Allah! I have a neighbour who is harassing me. He said: Go and put your belongings out on the street. So the man went and put his belongings out on the street. People gathered and asked: What's wrong with you? He said: I have a neighbour who is harassing me; I told the Prophet about it and he told me to go and put my belongings out on the street. They began to say: O Allah, curse him! O Allah, humiliate him! (The neighbour) heard about this, so he came to the man and told him: Go back into your house; by Allah, I will not disturb you again.»[44]

2. Seeking a fatwa, such as telling the *mufti*,[45] "My brother, or so-and-so, has done me wrong: how do I get out of this situation?" This is what happened in the hadith narrated above.

3. Seeking help to change a wrongful deed, or to prevent some disaster befalling a Muslim. This too may be referred to the hadith quoted above: it includes the critical appraisal of the reporters and witnesses in the transmission of hadiths — this is in order to protect the authenticity of the Hadith of the Prophet.

The Companion Zayd ibn Arqam (ﷺ) related: «We set out on a journey with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), in which we faced many hardships. 'Abdullâh ibn Ubayy said to his friends: Do not give what you have in your possession to those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they desert him. And in this case, when we return to Madinah, the honourable will drive out the meaner therefrom. I came

to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and told him about this. He sent someone to 'Abdullâh ibn Ubayy and he asked him whether he had said that or not. He swore an oath to the effect that he had not done that, and said that it was Zayd who had lied to the Messenger of Allah. Zayd said: I was very disturbed on account of this until this verse was revealed attesting that I had spoken the truth: ﴿When the hypocrites come to you...﴾ *(Qur'an 63: 1)*. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) then called them in order to seek forgiveness for them, but they turned their faces away...»[46]

With regard to this, Imam Ash-Shawkâni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

> The clear evidence concerning that is the hadith which is reported concerning *an-naṣeeḥah*[47] (sincerity) to Allah, to His Book, to His Messenger, to the leaders of the Muslims, to their common folk and to their elites. Exposing lies and liars is one of the greatest forms of naṣeeḥah, and it is obligatory towards Allah (ﷻ), His Messengers and all the Muslims.[48]

He also said:

> Likewise, exposing a person who has given false witness with regard to property, blood or honour, is also a form of the naṣeeḥah which Allah (ﷻ) has made obligatory on us.

4. Ash-Shareed (رضي الله عنه) reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «If someone is in a position to pay off his debts but does not do so, it is permitted to rebuke him harshly and to punish him.»[49] Ibn Mubârak defined the punishment as imprisonment on the request of the one who is owed money, so it is clear that talking about the debtor is permissible in this case.

Al-Munâwi, in *Qayd al-Qadeer*, also commented on this hadith, saying that the harsh rebuke could take the form of the one who is owed money telling his/her debtor, "You are a wrong-doer, you do not pay your debts on time," and so forth; but such rebukes should not

include foul language or insults to his/her honour. The punishment could be decreed by the judge in order to make him/her pay his/her debts, and could take the form of lashing or imprisonment.

5. Consultation in the matters of intended marriage or business partnerships, or asking about a particular neighbourhood (that is with a view to moving there), and so on.

When both Mu'âwiyah and Abul-Jaham asked for the hand of Fâṭimah bint Qays in marriage, she consulted the Prophet (ﷺ) about them. He told her: «As for Abul-Jaham, he does not drop his stick from his shoulder,[50] and as for Mu'âwiyah, he is poor, and has no money.»[51]

In another hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Each Muslim has six rights over another. It was asked: What are they, O Messenger of Allah? He said: When you meet him, you should greet him with *salâm* (peace); when he invites you, you should accept; if he asks for your advice, then you should advise him...»[52]

6. Mentioning the sin of one who commits sins openly, or the bid'ah (religious innovation) of the innovator.

No other faults of such people should be mentioned, unless there is good reason for doing so, as outlined above.

The Mother of the believers, 'Â'ishah (رضي الله عنها), narrated that: «A man asked permission to see the Prophet (ﷺ) who said: Let him enter! What a bad member of the tribe he is!»[53]

Bukhari concluded from this hadith that it is permissible to speak about wrongdoers and those about whom one has misgivings in their absence.

'Â'ishah (رضي الله عنها) further reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «I don't think so-and-so and so-and-so know anything about our religion.»[54]

Al-Layth commented, "They were two known hypocrites."

7. Description of someone who is known by a certain physical characteristic, such as 'the paraplegic', 'the deaf-mute', 'the blind lady', and so on.

It is not permitted to use these terms for the purposes of insulting; if it is possible to identify a person by another name, then this is better.

Usayyir ibn Jâbir reported: «The people of Kufa sent a delegation to 'Umar (ﷺ), the caliph, among whom was a man who was making fun of Uways. 'Umar said: Is there anyone from the tribe of Qaran here? That man (who had mocked Uways) came forward, and 'Umar said: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: A man will come to you from Yemen, and he will leave only his mother behind there. He will suffer from leprosy; he will pray to Allah, and Allah will cure him of it, except for a patch the size of a dinar or a dirham. Whoever of you meets him, let him ask for forgiveness for you.»[55]

Imam Ash-Shawkâni[56] (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

> If you ask me, "What if a person who had a nickname was not known by any other name?" I would say, "If such was the case, then that nickname would not really be a nickname at all; it would be a proper name by which the person is known, and he would not be known by any other name at all."

The specific legal rulings in the cases outlined above are summarized as follows: Criticism is not gheebah in six cases: complaint, identification, warning, criticizing someone who openly commits sin, seeking a fatwa, and asking for help to correct wrongdoing.

Conditions that must be fulfilled in the type of backbiting which is permitted

1. You must have pure sincerity of intention towards Allah (ﷻ). Whoever mentions something true about a person, not in order to

correct some wrongdoing, but to discredit him/her, is a sinner. An example of such would be if a person asked another for advice regarding marriage, and the latter told him/her something true, not for the purpose of exposing the facts, but because of some envy that s/he himself/herself felt, so that the person would not marry that particular woman or man. This is forbidden, but sadly there are many such instances.

2. You should only mention something that is true about your brother/sister if by doing so you will achieve one of the purposes outlined above, and as long as you do not mention any of his/her other faults unnecessarily.

3. You must be sure that any evil that may result from this sort of backbiting will not outweigh its benefits, and that it will not cause any *fitnah*[57] which may harm Muslims.

Repentance from backbiting

It is necessary to repent after participating in backbiting, and you must hasten to turn to Allah (ﷻ) and repent to Him, for none can forgive sins except Him.

There are four conditions to be met when repenting from the sin of backbiting:[58]

1. You must stop participating in backbiting.
2. You must regret what you have done.
3. You must be determined never to do it again.
4. You must ask your brother or sister to forgive you for having participated in backbiting against them, and to pray to Allah to forgive you.

If you fear that some evil may result from your telling him/her, then there is no need to do so, and it will be sufficient for you to pray for him/her.

Ibn Katheer, in his tafseer of Soorat al-Ḥujurât, wrote:

> ... Others say that asking him for forgiveness is not a condition (of repentance for gheebah), because if you told him about it, this may hurt him more than if he did not know about it.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) stated: "The ulema have said, 'If you have participated in backbiting, then ask your brother for forgiveness.'" Commenting on this, Shaykh Al-Albâni (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote, "This is if you do not fear any worse evil as a result of asking for his forgiveness; otherwise it is enough to pray for him."

Backbiting that is not recognized as such

People may engage in backbiting without recognizing that they are doing so. The following list outlines the different forms in which backbiting may be disguised.

1. A person may mention something about his/her brother/sister that s/he dislikes, and when challenged s/he says, "I'm prepared to say it to his/her face!" This attitude may be rejected on the following grounds:

1.a. You mentioned something about him/her that s/he dislikes, behind his/her back, and this is backbiting.

1.b. Your being prepared to say it to his/her face is a completely separate matter. It does not justify your having said something about your brother/sister that s/he dislikes behind his/her back.

1.c. There was absolutely no need to say it behind his/her back if you were able to say it to his/her face.

1.d. You have no guarantee that s/he will forgive you for what you said behind his/her back.

1.e. It is obvious from real life that being prepared to say something a

person dislikes to his face is not a valid claim. It is Satan's way of deceiving you into committing the sin of backbiting.

2. In a gathering of people, when some person is mentioned, a person may say, "*Alḥamdulillâh* (all praise is for Allah), that we don't grovel in front of the authorities!" or "I seek refuge with Allah from shamelessness!" or some such comments. By saying this, s/he both criticizes the other person and praises himself/herself.[59]

3. A person may say, "Some people, or some of the religious scholars, or some people we met, did such-and-such," knowing that the person to whom s/he is speaking will understand exactly what or who s/he means by that; this is still backbiting.[60]

4. A person may be asked about his/her brother or sister in Islam, and may say, "May Allah guide us, may Allah forgive us, may Allah guide him/her, we ask Allah for forgiveness, we seek refuge with Allah from evil," and so on so that it will be easily understood that s/he is criticizing the other person.

For example, a person may say, "So-and-so is only doing what any of us would do in the same situation."[61] By this they mean to imply criticism of the other person's behaviour.

5. A person may sarcastically refer to another by using high-sounding titles, thus intending to insult him/her.

6. A person may say, 'S/he is young, we are allowed to talk about him/her." This is a strange thing to say! There is no evidence that such a thing is allowed. There are no exceptions to the comprehensive prohibition of backbiting; it is forbidden to gossip about anyone — old or young, male or female, rich or poor. Why do they not say, "When a young person gossips about an old person, s/he is not sinning?" [62] Why do they not recall the hadith: «The pens have been lifted from three: from the insane person who has no control over his mind, until he recovers; from the sleeper until he awakes; and from the young boy until he reaches puberty.»[63]

7. It may happen that Allah (ﷻ) makes it easy for someone to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong in a difficult situation, which no one else could handle, and the person spoken to may respond by sincerely seeking to repent. However, thereafter Satan may mislead the one who gave the advice so that s/he begins to tell the story to others: "So-and-so did such-and-such, but I advised him/her in such a way..."

What motive can there be for telling this to others, apart from one's own whims and love of gossip? Is not the aim of 'enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil' to spread good among the people and stop evil? So why talk about it once this aim has been achieved? Or is it the case that the one who seeks to enjoin good becomes led by Satan and the one who seeks to stop evil falls into its trap?

8. Being careless with regard to gossip about a sinner.

This is a 'grey area': it is not generally permissible. It is not permitted to gossip about everyone who falls into sin, otherwise it would be permitted to gossip about all the Muslims! Every believer commits sins; this is confirmed by the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ): «Every believing slave has a sin which he will commit time after time, or which he habitually commits and which he will not give up until he leaves this world. The believer was created to be tested, to repent, and to forget; if he were to be reminded and encouraged, he would repent and remember.»[64]

In another hadith, he (ﷺ) said: «Every son of Adam constantly errs, and the best of those who err are those who repent.»[65]

How can they be so sure that gossiping about the sinner is allowed? How do they explain the words "your brother" in the hadith, «Backbiting means your saying about your brother something which he dislikes»? Does this phrase not cover both the righteous and the sinner?

How can it be otherwise, when the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim; he does not do him wrong, he does not let him down, and he does not belittle him. *Taqwâ*[66] is right here — and he pointed to his chest three times — It is evil enough if a man belittles his Muslim brother. Every Muslim is sacred to another Muslim: his blood, his wealth and his honour.»[67]

We ask those who take this matter lightly: is the blood of a Muslim sinner permissible? Obviously not! So why is his/her honour not likewise forbidden, when honour has been described, along with wealth and blood, as being sacred?

9. A person may describe another as an Indian, a Palestinian, a Persian, an Arab, a bedouin, a peasant, a cobbler, a carpenter, or a blacksmith,[68] using such terms for fun, when s/he himself/herself would hate to be described in such ways. All of this may be controlled by avoiding "mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes."

Adverse results that may come from a careless attitude towards participating in backbiting about the sinner

Harbouring a careless attitude towards backbiting has many adverse results. Below is a list of such outcomes:

1. Rejection of guidance, refusal to accept good advice, and hatred of those who call people to Allah (ﷻ).

Sadly, this kind of backbiting is most often committed by those who frequent the mosques and seek to call others to Allah (ﷻ). When they see a sinner, they begin to gossip about him or her, whether s/he neglects to pray, to pay *zakâh*,[69] or to fast, and so forth. When these sinners hear of the backbiting about them, they let it be known that

they hate the ones who engaged in backbiting against them, and that they can have no trust in them.

Those who seek to call people to Allah (ﷻ) and who frequent the mosques would do well to look at these sinners with compassion and concern, so that they might work harder to call them to Allah with gentle wisdom, in order that they may be guided. How many polytheists, atheists and sinners used to spread corruption throughout the world, but Allah (ﷻ) guided them and they became the best of peoples with the highest morals? History bears ample witness to this.

2. Hindrance of reconciliation between conflicting parties.

It may be the case that a person gossiped about his/her brother/sister, and when the latter heard about it, s/he gossiped about him/her in revenge. When the first person heard about what the second had said about him/her, s/he took the matter further and spread gossip about everything that the second person would hate to have said about him/her. The second person, in turn, would do likewise. When people come forward to try and reconcile them, each of them will say, "But s/he said such-and-such about me, I can never face him/her!"

All this back-stabbing, which sours the relationship between them, is caused by ignorance and carelessness. How often are these disasters and tragedies repeated in our communities! How many good relations have been destroyed by this kind of thing! How many close friendships have been destroyed by this hateful sin! Is it not time for these people to fear Allah (ﷻ), for their eyes to weep and for their backbiting to stop?

Beware of participating in backbiting about one who is incapacitated

It is strange indeed that we fail to help a person who is incapacitated in some way, and even stranger that we harass him/her

by gossiping about him/her.

The Companion Abu Dharr (ﷺ) narrated, «I said: O Messenger of Allah, which deeds are the best? He said: Belief in Allah and jihad for His sake. I asked: Which slaves are the best (to release)? He replied: Those who are most liked by their owners and who are the most valuable. I asked: What if I don't do that (release such a slave)? He said: Help someone who is trying to do something, or do something for someone who is unable to do it. I asked: O Messenger of Allah, what if I am not capable of doing something? He responded: Stop yourself from harming people, for this will be an act of charity from you for your own sake.»[70]

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) explained to Abu Dharr who the best slaves to release were, and he explained how those who were not in a position to release slaves may also do good: that is, by helping someone who is incapable or in need of help. Sadly, however, incapacitated or handicapped people are not safe from the evil of our tongues; many of us criticize them, gossip about them and make fun of what they do.

What is worse than backbiting

One of the problems that our community is currently facing is that we may see a person gossiping about his/her brother/sister, not because of some sin or fault of his/hers, but because of customs and traditions.

One of the unique attributes of Allah (ﷻ) is that He alone is the Lawgiver Who decrees what is allowed and what it prohibited; this has nothing to do with traditions and customs.

An example of this is the case where a person may invite two or three people to a meal; one of his/her brothers/sisters (who was not

invited on this occasion) may feel upset, so s/he begins to backbite about him, just because s/he was not invited. All this is the result of ignorance and a lack of religious knowledge. Where does it say that the person has to invite you every time s/he thinks of inviting guests for a meal? If you want proof that such an attitude is in fact forbidden, there is plenty of evidence, while there is nothing except your own whims to support you.

Or a person may do something good that is encouraged by the sharia, but because of ignorance about the rules of Islam, people will devour his/her flesh and his/her name will constantly be on the tongues of the ignorant and stupid. For example, a person may be very modest in his/her dress, although s/he can afford to dress well. Every time the ignorant people see him/her, they may say, "Look at this miser![71] Look at this person who has deprived himself/herself of the enjoyment of this world! Look at this one who has made our religion dull and lifeless!"

Are they not those whom the Prophet (ﷺ) described? «Whoever dresses modestly out of humility towards Allah, although he could afford to dress well, Allah will call him before all of creation on the Day of Resurrection and let him choose whatever garments of faith[72] he wishes to wear.»[73]

It is our duty to love this person for the sake of Allah (ﷻ), as long as s/he continues to be humble and have this good attitude, and as long as we know that s/he is practising Islam to the best of his/her ability.

First of all we should find out why s/he is doing this, and we should think: is it permissible or forbidden for us to speak badly of him/her, or to make an example of him and tell people, "S/he has made our religion dull and lifeless."

Allah (ﷻ) will call him/her on the Day of Resurrection, before all of creation, and let him/her choose whatever garments of faith s/he wants to wear. But what will your position be on that Day, you who

consume flesh by gossiping about believers? You will be in debt, and full of regret and fear.

Unspoken backbiting

We are all too familiar with the backbiting of the tongue, or that which is spoken, but backbiting can take other forms. Allah said:

﴿وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ ۝١﴾ (سورة الهُمَزة: ١)

﴿Woe to every [kind of] scandal-monger and backbiter.﴾

(Qur'an 104: 1)[74]

The Mother of the Believers, 'Â'ishah (رضي الله عنها) reported, «I said to the Prophet (ﷺ): It's bad enough that Ṣafiyah is... (Some narrators said she implied that Ṣafiyah was short). He said: You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been polluted by it. She said: I imitated someone in front of him, and he said: I would not like to imitate anybody even if I were given such-and-such.»[75]

An-Nawawi said:

> ...Likewise, all means which may be used to get the message across, such as imitating a person's walk, are backbiting. Indeed, they are worse than backbiting with words, as Al-Ghazâli said, because they are more obviously understood and the meaning is much clearer.[76]

The people who mock others by imitating their walk, or their manner of eating or talking, should fear Allah. The worst culprits nowadays are the so-called 'comedy shows', in which comedians and actors devote all their efforts to imitating some person in order to entertain people, regardless of the fate to which these sins will lead them. These sins include the failure to bring up children properly, and raising generations whose careless and sarcastic attitude shows no

concern for or interest in the affairs of the community or Ummah.[77] These shows and movies, it is sad to say, unfortunately, are widespread in cinemas and on TV, video, and even the Internet. May Allah guide us to His path.

Opposing backbiting is the "best of jihad"

Many people are surprised when they hear that opposing gheebah is one of the best forms of jihad, but their astonishment vanishes when they hear the words of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): «The mujâhid is the one who strives to control his ego in obedience to Allah.»[78] He (ﷺ) also said: «The best of jihad is that you strive to control your ego and your desires for the sake of Allah.»[79] Keeping oneself busy trying to prevent backbiting is jihad; indeed it is one of the best forms of jihad.

Jihad against the enemies of Allah (ﷻ) can only ever occupy a limited period in a person's life; but the struggle to control the ego (*jihâd an-nafs*) only ends when the person's life ends. And jihad against the enemies of Islam can only be accepted from the Muslim as long as s/he is also striving to free his/her ego from hypocrisy, ethnocentrism and self-interest.

Every Muslim is obliged to strive to control his/her ego and to prevent it from encouraging backbiting; s/he must establish an Islamic state in his/her heart before it can be established on earth.

﴿... وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝٤ بِنَصْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ يَنصُرُ مَن يَشَآءُ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ۝٥﴾ (سورة الرُّوم: ٤-٥)

﴿... On that Day shall the believers rejoice — with the help of Allah. He helps whom He will, and He is Exalted in Might, Most Merciful.﴾

(Qur'an 30: 4-5)

Anecdotes on the condemnation of backbiting

1. It is reported from Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri (ﷺ) that a man said to him, "You have gossiped about me." He (Al-Ḥasan) said, "You have not reached such a position that you can control my *ḥasanât* (rewards for doing good deeds)!"[80]

2. Someone was told, "So-and-so has gossiped about you." So he sent him a dish of dates with the message: "I heard that you had given me your ḥasanât as a gift, and I want to return the favour; please excuse me for not being able to pay back in full."

3. It is reported from Ibn Mubârak (may Allah have mercy on him) that he said, "If I were to indulge in backbiting about anyone, I would gossip about my parents, for they have more right to my ḥasanât."

4. Backbiting is the hospitality of the wrongdoer.

5. 'Amr ibn al-'Âṣ (ﷺ) narrated that he passed by a dead mule and said to some of his companions, "It would be better for a man to eat his fill from the meat of this than from the flesh of his fellow Muslims."[81]

6. A man mentioned something bad about another to his friend. His friend said to him, "Do you go out and fight against the Romans?" He said, "No." His friend asked, "Do you go out and fight against the Turks?" He said, "No." The friend said, "The Romans are safe from you, and the Turks are safe from you, but your Muslim brothers are not safe from you!"

7. If you are unable to do three things, then you must do three (other) things: if you cannot do good, then stop doing evil; if you cannot benefit people, then do not harm them; if you cannot fast, then do not eat the flesh of other people.

8. A poet said:

If a man is wise and fears Allah,
This will keep him too busy to concern himself
with the faults of others,
Just as the weak and sick person is too concerned
with his own pain
To think of the pain of others.

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Notes

[1] Ibn Katheer said, in his tafseer of this *soorah* (chapter of the Qur'an): "There were narrated (concerning *gheebah*) reports which strongly condemned it. Hence Allah (ﷻ) likened backbiting to the eating of a dead person's flesh" — i.e., as you would naturally abhor the one, so you should, according to sharia, abhor the other, for it is even worse.

[2] Quoted by As-Suyuṭi, *Zawâ'id al-Jâmi'*, from the report of al-Kharâ'iṭi in *Masâwi' al-Akhlâq*. Mâlik reported something similar, with a *mursal* chain of narration, as mentioned in *Silsalat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaheeḥah*, by Al-Albâni, hadith no. 1992. *Mursal* is a category of hadith with a narration that a tâbi'ee ascribes to the Prophet (ﷺ) without mentioning the Companion that he took it from. A tâbi'ee is a person who has never seen the Prophet (ﷺ) but has seen a Companion of the Prophet (ﷺ).

[3] Muslim, *Kitâb al-Birr waṣ-Ṣilâḥ wa'l-Adab, Bâb Taḥreem al-Gheebah,* hadith no. 2589; Abu Dâwood, Tirmidhi and Aḥmad

[4] Tirmidhi, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, hadith no. 1655; Abu Dâwood, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 4083; Ibn Ḥibbân. Classified as *ḥasan* (acceptable) by Al-Albâni, *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 420

[5] *tafseer*: exegeses; commentary, or explanation of the meanings (*usu.* of Qur'anic verses)

[6] See Al-Qurṭubi, tafseer of *Soorat al-Ḥujurât.*

[7] Researched by Al-Albâni

[8] *shirk*: associating partners with Allah

[9] The title and points covered have been adapted from Al-Ghazâli, *Iḥyâ' 'Uloom ad-Deen*, pp. 1-6, with the addition of some further points, relevant quotations and explanations, which were not mentioned by Al-Ghazâli.

[10] *Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 3997; *Ḥoor al-'een* are beautiful women of paradise. See Glossary for further explanation.

[11] Part of a hadith narrated by Tirmidhi. See *Takhreej aṭ-Ṭaḥâwiyah*, h. no. 278.

[12] Muslim and Aḥmad

[13] This was the case at the time of Imam Al-Ghazâli, and it is even worse nowadays, with the many plays and productions that are put on by the various media. This sort of 'entertainment' is seen as normal and acceptable in many societies nowadays.

[14] Tirmidhi, Abu Dâwood. See *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 376

[15] See my book, *Ḥaṣâ'id al-Alsun.*

[16] It is not right to mention his/her name unless there is good cause for doing so. See "Types of backbiting that are permitted", p. 39 of this book.

[17] Tirmidhi, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, hadith no. 1969. See *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 946.

[18] Reported by Al-'Aqeeli, Ibn 'Adiyy and Al-Quḍâ'i, in *Musnad ash-Shihâb*, with a chain of narration whose narrators are trustworthy, apart from Salâm ibn Abi aṣ-Ṣahba', about whom there was some disagreement, but it is ḥasan because of corroborating evidence. See *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 658. Al-Mundhiri said that Al-Bazzâr mentioned it with a good chain of narration (*At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, vol. 3 p. 570).

[19] Bukhari, vol. 1, hadith no. 26; vol. 2, hadith no. 215; vol. 5, hadith no. 224; Muslim, hadith no. 1218

[20] Narrated by Aṭ-Ṭabarâni in *Al-Awsaṭ* from the report of 'Umar ibn Rasheed, who is a weak narrator. Shaykh Al-Albâni mentioned that other similar reports were narrated via other chain of narration (*Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 1871). The hadith is authentic because of the various corroborating chains of narration.

[21] Abu Dâwood, hadith no. 4875; *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 4080; At-Tirmidhi said it is a ṣaḥeeḥ ḥasan hadith; Al-Bayhaqi. See *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 427.

[22] Al-Isbahâni, with a ḥasan chain of narration, as in Al-Mundhiri, *At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb* (*At-Tarheeb min al-Backbiting*, hadith no. 13). Al-Albâni classified it as ḥasan in *Ṣaḥeeḥ at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb.*

[23] *qareen*: a jinn or devil whose task it is to accompany a person constantly and try to mislead him/her. (Translator) Jinn are non-human, rational beings created by Allah, often referred to as 'demons'. (Editor)

[24] Aḥmad; Abu Dâwood (*Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 4082). See *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 533.

[25] Aṭ-Ṭabarâni, *Al-Kabeer*, hadith no. 10092. Al-Haythami, in *Al-Majma'*, said its narrators are reliable. Al-Albâni classified it as ṣaḥeeḥ in *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 428. Also found in *At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, vol. 3, p. 506.

[26] In order to make it easier to fulfil this requirement, according to sharia, of learning about the permissible and forbidden, Allah enabled me to write *Haṣâ'id al-Alsun* (*The Harvest of the Tongues*); praise be to Allah for His blessings.

[27] Part of the hadith narrated by Bukhari, vol. 6, hadith no. 3; *Fatḥ al-Bâri*, vol. 8, hadith no. 113 and hadith no. 4418; Muslim, hadith no. 2769. See also my book, *Min Mawâqif aṣ-Ṣaḥâbah* (Part 5).

[28] Narrated and classified as ḥasan by At-Tirmidhi. Classified as ḥasan by Shaykh Al-Albâni, *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 431.
[29] Aḍ-Ḍiyâ': *Al-Mukhtaṣarah*. See also *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 1217.
[30] The fact that they enjoy it is obvious from their lack of regret and repentance, and from their persistence in committing this sin. Indeed, their enjoyment is obvious every time the victim is mentioned.
[31] See "Common but invalid excuses for backbiting", p. 20 of this book.
[32] The hadith reads: «Whoever of you sees an evil deed should change it with his hand (by acting), or if he cannot do that, then with his tongue (by speaking out), or if he cannot do that, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.» Reported by Muslim in *Kitâb al-Eemân*, hadith no. 49
[33] Al-Khara'iṭee, *Makârim al-Akhlâq*; also Ibn 'Asâkir. There is nothing wrong with its chain of narration as there is corroborating evidence. See *Ghâyat al-Marâm* (below hadith no. 431).
[34] Aḥmad. It is ṣaḥeeḥ because of corroborating and similar reports. See *Ghâyat al-Marâm* (hadith no. 431).
[35] See "The prohibition of listening to backbiting", p. 31 of this book.
[36] Abu Dâwood, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 4086, edited by Shaykh al-Albâni and Ibn Abi Dunya. See also Al-Albâni, *Ṣaḥeeḥ at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb.*
[37] Aḥmad; Bukhari, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*. This hadith is ḥasan; see *Ghâyat al-Marâm*, hadith no. 429.
[38] Aḥmad; Ṭabarâni, *Al-Awsaṭ*. See also *Ṣaḥeeḥ at-Targheeb: At-Tarheeb min Iṣabat al-Bawl at-Thawbah wa Ghayrihi*, hadith no. 152. Also narrated in *At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, in *Bâb mâ Jâ'a fee 'Aqoobat an-Nammâm.*
[39] Bukhari, vol. 1, p. 10, hadith no. 13; Muslim
[40] *(Qur'an 12: 53)* (Translator)
[41] *(Qur'an 40: 19)* (Translator)
[42] Adapted from An-Nawawi, *Riyâḍ aṣ-Ṣâliḥeen*, with explanations and references as necessary.
[43] Bukhari, hadith no. 7180; Muslim, hadith no. 1714
[44] Bukhari, *Adab al-Mufrad*, hadith no. 124. Al-Ḥâfidh al-Mundhiri classified its chain of narration as ḥasan in *at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, and it is reported elsewhere. See also Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, *al-Iḥtijâj bil-Qadr*, hadith nos. 57 and 58 (ed. Al-Albâni).
[45] A fatwa is a religious decree or verdict, and a mufti is a person qualified to issue such verdicts. (Editor)
[46] Bukhari, hadith no. 4903 and Muslim, hadith no. 2772. 'Turning their faces

away' meant that they did not want the Prophet (ﷺ) to ask for forgiveness for them.

[47] The word *naṣeeḥah*, translated here as 'sincerity', also carries the meanings of 'good advice', 'doing justice to a person or situation', 'integrity', etc. See *an-Nawawi's Forty Hadith,* hadith no. 7. (Translator)

[48] *Raf' ar-Reebah*, ed. Muhammad Ibraheem ash-Shaybai, p. 27 (Maktabat Ibn Taymiyah, Kuwait)

[49] Abu Dâwood, hadith no. 3628, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood* ed. by Al-Albâni, hadith no. 3086; An-Nasâ'i; Ibn Mâjah. Classified as ṣaḥeeḥ by Al-Albâni in *al-Irwâ' al-Ghaleel,* hadith no. 1434.

[50] This phrase may mean either that he travels a great deal, or that he is accustomed to beating his wives frequently.

[51] Muslim, hadith no. 1480

[52] Muslim, hadith no. 2162

[53] Bukhari, hadith no. 6054; Muslim, hadith no. 2591

[54] Bukhari, hadith no. 6067

[55] Muslim, hadith no. 2542

[56] *Raf' ar-Reebah*, p. 33

[57] *fitnah*: (attempting to sow) discord between Muslims

[58] The first three conditions apply to repentance in general, for any sin against Allah (i.e., any sin in which no other person is involved or affected). See *Riyâḍ aṣ-Ṣâliḥeen, Bâb at-Tawbah.*

[59] Adapted from *Mukhtaṣar Minhâj al-Qâsideen.*

[60] An-Nawawi, *al-Adhkâr* (*Bâb Bayân Mahammât Tata'allaq bi-Hadd al-Gheebah*).

[61] Ibid.

[62] This does not mean that young people are encouraged to participate in backbiting; we should teach them to give up this and every other forbidden act.

[63] Abu Dâwood, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood* ed. by Shaykh al-Albâni hadith no. 3701, et al. See also *al-Irwâ'*, under hadith no. 297.

[64] Aṭ-Ṭabarani, with an authentic chain of narration; see *Silsalat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 2276.

[65] At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Mâjah. See also *Mishkât al-Maṣâbeeḥ*, hadith no. 2341.

[66] *taqwâ*: fearful awareness of Allah; being mindful of Allah

[67] Part of a hadith narrated by Muslim, hadith no. 2564. Part of it is also in Bukhari, hadith nos. 2442, 6951.

[68] Adapted from An-Nawawi, *al-Adhkâr, Bâb Taḥreem al-Gheebah wan-Nameemah.*

[69] zakâh or zakât: obligatory charity; an 'alms tax' on wealth payable by Muslims and to be distributed to other Muslims who qualify as recipients

[70] Bukhari, hadith no. 2518; Muslim, hadith no. 84

[71] Commenting on such people by saying things that are not true is very serious. People who say such things need to be reminded of the words of the Prophet: «Whoever says something about a believer which is not true will be detained in *radghat al-khabâl* (a kind of muddy swamp) until he can find a way to justify what he said.» [Reported by Aḥmad, Abu Dâwood and Al-Ḥakim, who said: its chain of narration is ṣaḥeeḥ. Adh-Dhahabi and Al-Albâni, (*Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 438) agreed with him, and mentioned another chain of narration]. In Muslim, hadith no. 2002, it says: «They said: O Messenger of Allah, what is the mud of *al-Khabâl*? He said: It is the sweat or the fluids of the people of hell.»

[72] Garments of faith: the clothes of paradise that the people of faith will be given, and Allah knows best.

[73] Tirmidhi, who classified it as ḥasan; Al-Ḥâkim, who said its chain of narration is ṣaḥeeḥ, and Adh-Dhahabi agreed with him; Aḥmad; Abu Na'eem, *al-Ḥilyah*. Al-Albâni said, after quoting some similar reports, that generally the hadith is ṣaḥeeḥ because of these similar reports. *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 718.

[74] In the tafseer of Ibn Katheer, "*Al-hammâz* (scandal-mongering) is by speech, and *al-lammâz* (backbiting) is by deed. Ibn 'Abbâs said that *humazah* and *lumazah* are those who criticize people. Ar-Rabee' ibn Anas said that the humazah criticizes to a person's face and the lumazah criticizes behind his/her back. Al-Mujâhid said that al-humazah is by hand and eye, and al-lumazah is by the tongue.

[75] Abu Dâwood: *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 4080. Some of it is reported in, "Hadiths aimed at deterring people from backbiting", see p. 28

[76] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytami, *Az-Zawâjir*, vol. 2, p. 17

[77] Ummah: community or nation; usually used to refer to the entire global community of Muslims

[78] Part of a hadith narrated by Imam Aḥmad; see also *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 549

[79] Abu Na'eem, *Al-Ḥilyah*; Ad-Daylami. See also *Silsilat al-Aḥâdeeth aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, hadith no. 1496.

[80] *ḥasanât*: rewards for good deeds; The Islamic teaching is that the *ḥasanât* of the one who engages in backbiting will be awarded to his/her victim. (Translator)

[81] This report from 'Amr ibn al-'Âṣ is proven, *Ṣaḥeeḥ at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*.

Glossary

alḥamdulillâh	الحمد لله	all praise is for Allah
Allâhu akbar	الله أكبر	Allah is the Greatest
bid'ah	بدعة	innovation, *esp*. undesired innovation in matters of religion
fatwa (fatwah)	فتوة	religious decision or decree
fitnah	فتنة	(attempting to sow) discord between Muslims
ghareeb	غريب	lit. 'strange' or 'unusual': a category of hadith in which at some points in its chain there is only one narrator
hammâz	همّاز	a person who slanders, and makes it a regular habit
humazah	همزة	slanderer
ḥasan	حسن	a grade of hadith: acceptable
ḥasanât	حسنات	good deeds performed by the believer that are rewarded by Allah
ḥoor al-'een	حور العين	beautiful, wide-eyed women of paradise; in the opinion of some, these women are created especially for paradise, and are different from the women of this world who will enter paradise
ijmâ'	إجماع	consensus: a method of deriving rulings in jurisprudence
inshâ' Allah	إن شاء الله	God willing

jihad (jihâd)	جهاد	struggle or striving (in Allah's cause)
jihâd an-nafs	جهاد النفس	Struggling to against one's ego and desires for the sake of Allah
jinn	جن	non-human, rational beings created by Allah, often referred to as demons
lammâz	لمّاز	a person who backbites, and makes it a regular habit
lumazah	لمزة	backbiter
Mina	منى	a location about 5 kilometres east of Makkah where the pilgrims stay to perform certain rites of hajj
mufti	مفتي	a learned person qualified to issue a derived ruling from revealed sources
mujâhid (pl. mujâhideen)	مجاهد (مجاهدين)	one who strives in the way of Allah; a fighter in jihad
mursal	مرسل	a category of hadith: a narration that a *tâbi'ee* ascribes to the Prophet (ﷺ) without mentioning the Companion from whom he took it
naṣeeḥah	نصيحة	sincere advice aimed at correcting a situation
qadar	القدر	divine predestination; destiny; power; exact measure
qareen	قرين	an associate, with specific reference to a demon who accompanies a person, whispering or urging him/her to do wrong
radghat al-khabâl	ردغة الخبال	a murky swamp containing the body fluids of the people of hellfire

ṣaḥeeḥ	صحيح	a grade of hadith: sound or authentic
ḥasan ṣaḥeeḥ	حسن صحيح	a grade of hadith: sound or authentic as well as acceptable
salâm	سلام	peace; a greeting of peace
sharia (shari'ah)	شريعة	Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah
shaykh	شيخ	teacher, mentor, scholar
shirk	الشرك	associating partners with Allah
soorah or soorat	سورة	chapter of the Qur'an
tafseer	تفسير	exegeses: commentary, or explanation of the meanings (usu. of Qur'anic verses)
tâbi'ee	تابعي	a person who has never seen the Prophet (ﷺ) but has seen a Companion of the Prophet (ﷺ)
taqwâ	التقوى	fearful awareness of Allah; being mindful of Allah; pious dedication; being careful not to transgress the bounds set by Allah
Ummah	أمّة	community or nation: *usu.* used to refer to the entire global community of Muslims
zakât (zakâh or zakât)	زكاة	obligatory charity: an 'alms tax' on wealth payable by Muslims and to be distributed to other Muslims who qualify as recipients